

Abstract

The dissertation *Magical Realism in Persian and Saudi Narrative Writing* views as essential the assumption that the phenomenon of magical realism is not restricted solely to the cultures with colonial legacy, but is transferable to literary works created under systematic and systemic violence anywhere in the world. Previous research of the dissertation's author proved the existence of parallels in the dynamics of sociopolitical development of Iran and Saudi Arabia in the 20th century, foremost in the power relation of the states to their citizens and in the status of women in the society, while there was a strong tendency towards institutionalization of the traditional patriarchal, androcentric and misogynic societal paradigms since the second half of the 20th century. In the last thirty years, women have countered this situation through increased literary activity that has turned out to be an important means of self-fulfillment and emancipation. The fact that some of the most significant Iranian and Saudi women writers use magical realism directed the research to examination of this concept's relevance for the Persian and Saudi narrative writing, inquiry into the reflection of the gender issues and their comparison in both literatures. A detailed case study of two works, each from one country, led to the achievement of these aims, for which the novels *Sidi Wahdāno* by a Saudi writer Raja Alem and *Zanān bedūn-e mardān* (*Women without Men*) by an Iranian author Shahnush Parsipur were chosen.

Both works represent an authentic magical realism rooted in the cultural and literary heritage of the Middle East, striving for subversion of totalitarian systems and discourses established in both states and societies. While the Saudi novel's emphasis is on the specific and unique identity of the Meccan culture, the Persian one exposes more the myths and stereotypes centered around female sexuality which are the source of violence targeting especially women, but affecting men as well. The Saudi novel does not outright refuse the patriarchal traditions, stressed is namely the diversity of the lived reality, determined by specific circumstances and temperament of every individual. The rich Meccan folklore is presented as one that includes naturally both the stances going against any repressive form of patriarchy or androcentrism, and totally opposing the wahhabi-saudi version of Islam (foreign to the Hijaz region), that combined with the political power destroys the cultural heritage of Mecca. Both works differ also in their language aesthetics and the use of magical realist techniques. On contrary, the texts resemble each other in connection with literary topology, where their ontological relationship to the sacred, the secret and knowledge emerges, which is

obviously based on the same philosophical and mystical sources. In this regard, both novels share a vision of a united and animated cosmos as well as a message of the eternity of the soul, energy, existence, and matter.